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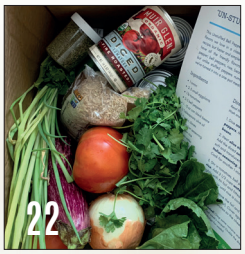

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Volume 26, Issue 673 • March 11-24, 2021

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For our Privacy Policy, go to LavenderMagazine.com/resources/privacy-policy

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5100 Eden Ave, Suite 107, Edina, MN 55436
612-436-4660 **Office**
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mmpa Lavender 2016 Magazine of the Year
Printer of Lavender
Schumann Printers, Inc.
920-484-3348

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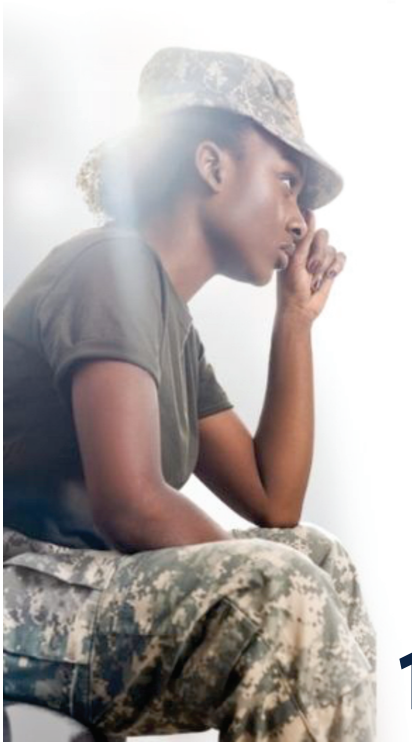

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY RYAN PATCHIN

Wait 'til Spring

Thinking back as far as I can, I believe my first "real" date took place when I was 16, on Valentine's Day. I hadn't realized the coincidental calendar commitment I had made at the time. My mistake.

This date required planning: I needed to borrow a car, not only for the date itself, but I couldn't show up empty handed—my preplanning phase would involve a trip to the mall. I needed to make dinner arrangements and I needed to find a movie for us watch after dinner.

I remember carefully curating my outfit—and not wearing it to school that day to avoid the hallway roasting it would have garnered. I doubled back to my mom's house after school and changed into my ruffled, purple button-up and some too-baggy khakis. King of romance.

Driving my stepdad's Honda Accord, I picked up my date and we had dinner in the restaurant at the local ski resort. It's where we met; home turf. After dinner, we made our way to the theater, where I bought a pair of tickets to *A Beautiful Mind*. Before the movie, we exchanged gifts in the parking lot. *Curve* by Liz Claiborne for them, and a plate of baked goods for me. And a mounting migraine.

Halfway through the movie I left the theater. I didn't say anything; I just bolted. I had reached the nausea phase of the migraine cycle quicker than usual, so I had to go on the offensive. Eight minutes after abandoning my date in the theater, I abandoned my dinner in the parking lot.

Gum, new parking spot, composure.

I re-joined my date in the theater and watched the remaining 30 minutes of the film. They were a great sport about everything; I never had to explain myself. I always wondered if they noticed the car was in a different parking space than it was before the movie started. I don't recall a second date.

Next came school dances and dates with work or school crushes. My early dating days preceded internet-assisted dating, so what you saw is what you got. Lots of mall trips and lake walks with people I already knew. Dozens of bags of popcorn—whose leftovers often lingered longer than my feelings did—accompanied the myriad of mindless movies I sat through in the pursuit of love. I saw *Wedding Crashers* twice.

I'll package up my 18 years of dating experience into a single sentence: don't start a relationship in the winter. It's too cold to be standing around, waiting to be buzzed-into a building, or walking to an obscure parking spot to accommodate those *super exclusive* dinner reservations. Nothing says fancy like a cold-induced stutter for the ride home.

The good news is that we survived another one. Your life might look different than it did when winter set its hooks in months back, but we've reached our annual reset—we're on spring's doorstep. The world around us is slowly coming back to life—begging us to come back to it.

It's dating season.

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A WORD IN EDGEWISE | BY E.B. BOATNER

Where Are the Plagues of Yesteryear?

I recommend Hans Zinsser's 1935 *Rats, Lice and History*, a surprisingly witty, acerbic biography of Typhus. That "biography" is no journalist's gimmick. A bacteriologist and professor at the Harvard Medical School, in 1931 Zinsser isolated the typhus bacteria.

"In following infectious diseases about the world," Zinsser writes, "one ends by regarding them as biological individuals which have lived through centuries, spanning many generations of men and having existences which, in their developments and wanderings, can be treated biographically."

Concerning causes of war and concomitant diseases he writes, "Until they actually suffered from dirt, lousiness, fatigue, terror, disease, or wounds, most men enjoyed the last war" but, "soldiers have rarely won wars. They more often mop up after the barrage of epidemics. And typhus, with its brothers and sisters—plague, cholera, typhoid, dysentery—has decided more campaigns than Caesar, Hannibal, Napoleon, and all the inspector generals of history. "The epidemics get the blame for defeat, the generals the credit for victory."

"The difficulty is not to find evidence, but to select from the dreadful abundance," says Zinsser, citing among others, Herodotus and the saving of Greece after disease decimated Xerxes' troops; the plague of Athens; the Huns losing Constantinople, pointing out, "The history of the Crusades reads like the chronicle of a series of diseases," while in 1812, after Moscow "Typhus and dysentery were Napoleon's chief opponents."

Early accounts are too vague to decisively identify Typhus, notes Zinsser; not until the 15th century, during the civil wars of Grenada, 1489-90, could it be accurately diagnosed. There are many shared disease symptoms, but tell-tale body rash from Typhus was unique.

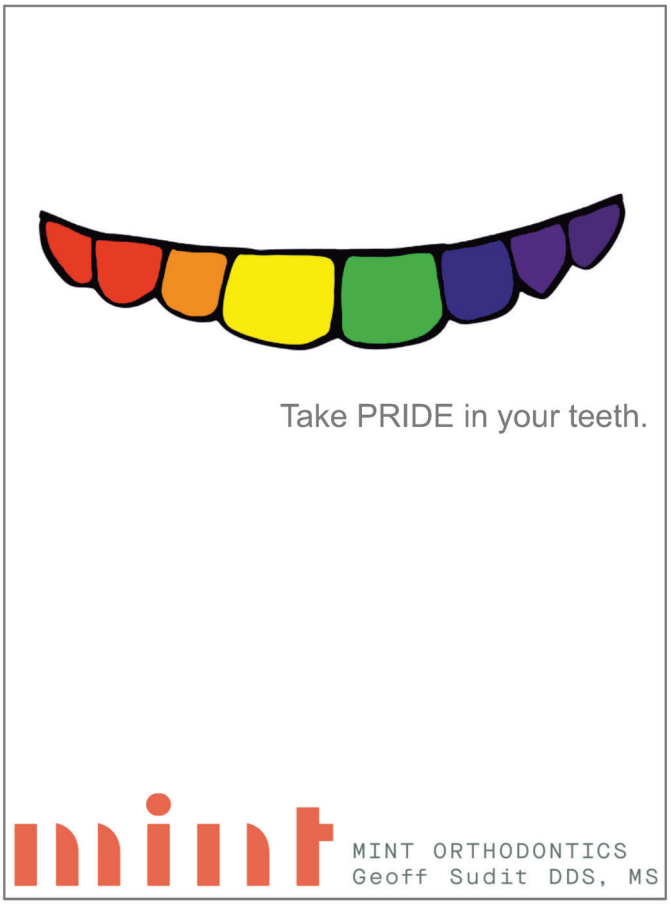
Zinsser's remark, "…the [Typhus] infection was sporadically present at all times, much as typhoid fever is with us now," brings a frisson. "Now" is a moveable feast: In 1935, one still feared typhoid; online today one finds there are perhaps 400 typhoid cases a year, here, some 70% of which are contracted by travelers to less developed countries.

Zinsser's book appeared five years before penicillin was first used in the United States; even then, half the country's available supply was used on *one* patient. In 1935, there were no scanning electron microscopes; today researchers employ immunoelectron microscopy, cryo electron microscopy, and electron tomography to see viruses Zinsser never could.

Typhus and Typhoid, both bacterial, yielded to antibiotics; today, viruses are pushed through genetic hoops, including viral genome structure, replication, and genetic change. But our physicians, like Zinsser, Hippocrates, Galen, Jenner, or Lister, can only advance as far as the available knowledge and tools of their era. And something new is always on the horizon.

As we strive to conquer COVID, people now know enough about prevention to address some causes, if not the cures themselves. Back through the centuries, overcrowding, unsanitary living conditions, poor hygiene have all allowed a host of death-dealing diseases to piggyback along. We have knowledge today to help ourselves and our professionals and to be alert.

We are the fuel; disease is the flame. The more fuel available, the more consuming the flame–and the longer the burn. ∎



LAVENDER LENS | PHOTOS BY SOPHIA HANTZES

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM PLAY THROUGH PANDEMIC AND STAND UP FOR JUSTICE

FEBRUARY 28, 2021

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OUR LAVENDER

COMMUNITY | BY RYAN PATCHIN

Lavender's 2021 Pride Edition Cover Contest

Do you know the face of Pride?

An acquaintance? A relative? Maybe it's you…If you or someone you know deserves to be the face of Pride in the Twin Cities, and grace the cover of *Lavender's* Pride issue, we want to know!

Tell us why your candidate qualifies to be featured in *Lavender*. How has this person gone above and beyond to serve others? What innovations has this individual brought to light? Whatever the reason, *Lavender* is committed to the search; all submissions will be considered.

Voting opens April 8 and runs through April 22. *Lavender* will announce the winner on April 23, 2021. Visit www.lavendermagazine.com/pridecover to submit an entry.

The contest winner will appear as the cover model for *Lavender's* 2021 Pride Edition. The 2021 Pride Edition will also include a feature article highlighting the contest winner. The winner will receive $500 worth of gift cards to community restaurants and retail businesses. ▮

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The Woman's Club

BY HOLLY PETERSON

"The Woman's Club is one of the best kept secrets in Minneapolis. It's seven stories and 66,000 square feet of mystery," says Jennifer Van Wyk, Director of Strategic Growth at The Woman's Club of Minneapolis. Van Wyk is joking, but only a little bit. Somehow, despite being designated a Minneapolis Historic Treasure and towering above Loring Park, The Woman's Club of Minneapolis continues to operate in relative anonymity. For almost one hundred years, this gorgeous building has been a hub for various charitable projects, professional development, and arts and culture events. Oh – and it is one of the most stunning wedding venues in the Twin Cities.

Although the building was not constructed until 1928, The Woman's Club has been a force to be reckoned with since 1907. With ventures ranging from scholarship programs, putting plumbing in schools, building playgrounds and libraries, and various projects surrounding food security, The Woman's Club has worked tirelessly for the benefit of Minneapolis for over a century. Most recently, The Woman's Club partnered with Involve MN to provide homemade, fresh meals for unhoused individuals in Minneapolis.

"You're sure to find a way to make an impact in the Twin Cities as a member of the Woman's Club", Van Wyk says. Of course, the club seeks to provide valuable resources for its members even as its members do the same for their communities. Whether you are a senior looking to connect socially, a young professional looking to network, or just a regular person who wants to be the first to know about the arts and culture events hosted by the club – you are sure to find what you are looking for.

And do not let the name deceive you: membership is open to anyone, regardless of gender.

If you are just looking for a beautiful place to hold your wedding, you might not care about the extraordinary story of The Woman's Club. Even stripped of its philanthropic pursuits and feminist history, The Woman's Club does not disappoint. Outdoor events on the rooftop terrace enjoy a magical view of Loring Park and downtown Minneapolis. Indoor events have several rooms of varying sizes to choose from, each more spectacular than the last.

Continued on page 14

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Designed by Léon Arnal (also known for designing the Foshay Tower), this is a venue that you will never forget. Bronze chandeliers, hand-carved plaster, oak floors, and more await you and your guests. "It's very Gatsby feeling," Van Wyk says. "The dark wood, the big, picturesque windows…" She grins, "there are parts of the building that feel like Robert Redford is going to come around the corner."

Events at The Woman's Club are infinitely customizable. Rentable rooms range from a library to a ballroom to the aforementioned rooftop terrace and more. The Woman's Club is happy to answer specific questions about rates and availability. "Everything is based on the couple," says Van Wyk. Of course, there are special rates available for members.

Over the years The Woman's Club has built relationships with businesses across the Twin Cities that they are happy to share with couples. Once the team at The Woman's Club gets to know the couple, they are ready with suggestions of businesses that will fit that specific couple's aesthetic and budget. This means that every aspect of your wedding – from the flowers to the photography to the music and more – can support local business owners. This was the "mentality of the women who started this club," says Van Wyk. "Let's all win."

Recent weddings at The Woman's Club have run on the small side to comply with COVID regulations but hope springs eternal that safely hosting larger events is also on the horizon. "We honor the guidelines," says Van Wyk. "We are ready and willing to take the time and energy to do everything safely." Practically speaking, this translates to following mask rules, social distancing, limiting event sizes, and maintaining strict sanitation regimens. The team at The Woman's Club has worked side

by side with couples for the last year to ensure that they get the picture-perfect wedding they have dreamt of without compromising the safety of their families.

Whether you are looking for a breathtaking venue to celebrate your big day or are looking to build community and create change with like-minded people, The Woman's Club is sure to surprise and delight you. "Come inside and have a look," says Van Wyk. "Come and have a beer on the rooftop (when it's open again), come to a show, listen to a featured storyteller or author, come and be a member. There is something for everyone. You just have to look inside."

"And bring your mask." ▮

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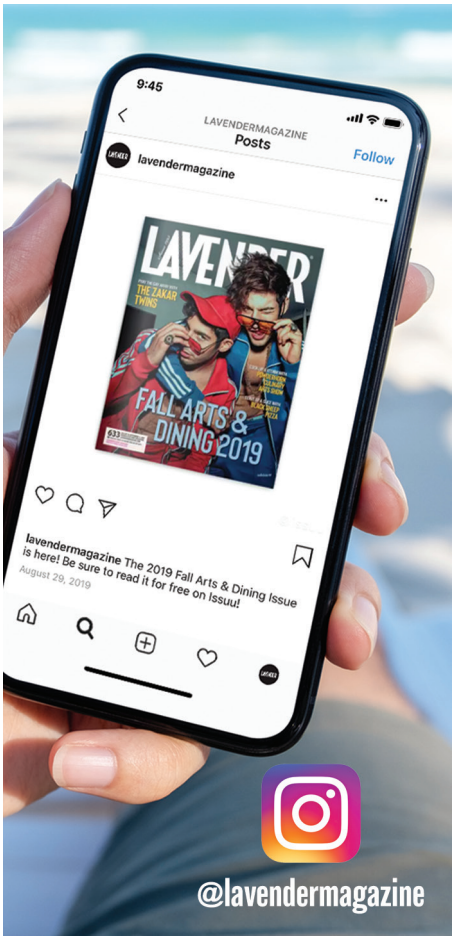

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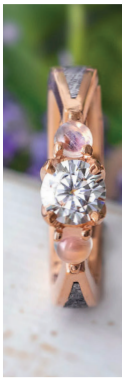

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The Difficulties of Divorce

For any couple, divorce is complicated and messy. But for LGBTQ+ couples, the process is even more difficult.

BY KASSIDY TARALA

The decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court case that made same-sex marriage legal in all fifty states, will turn six years old this summer. That's right—it's only six. That's the same age as my dog. I have plants older than same-sex marriage. So, since the U.S. government dragged its feet for so long to make a very, very basic right even exist, of course it's going to be a bit complicated and murky at first.

And complicated and murky LGBTQ+ marriage certainly is, especially in regard to divorce.

Same-sex marriages recognized in all fifty states date back to just 2015. But of course, many of these relationships date back much farther. Many LGBTQ+ couples have been together for much longer than their marriage certificate says.

Couples who have been together for decades, but only legally married for the past six years, sometimes have difficulties during the asset division process and alimony determination, according to The Foray Firm, located in Illinois.

"External factors will be taken into consideration when determining who gets what. For couples who have been together for decades but have legal recognition of the marriage for only the past few years, property that they purchased together before getting legally married may not be considered marital property," The Foray Firm's website states.

When determining who will pay spousal maintenance, other issues arise. The number of years that you are legally married plays a significant role in how much is paid and how long the payments will last. However, without proof of a decades-long relationship, you may have difficulties obtaining proper maintenance amounts.

In all divorces, having children makes things much more complicated. For LGBTQ+ couples, however, there are even more issues to address.

Parents seeking a divorce spend time formulating a parenting plan, determining who the primary caregiver will be, and deciding how much child support will be paid.

"If you and your spouse are involved in a collaborative divorce, then you may be able to make these decisions between each other. However, if you are seeking divorce litigation, the judge will make decisions about your allocation of parental responsibilities," according to The Foray Firm.

Biological connection—not parenting skills—is considered first, so, depending on who the biological parent is, they may be granted primary parenting time with the child. For parents who are not the biological parents and never formally adopted the child, a judge could grant co-parents full parental responsibility.

In Minnesota, same-sex marriage became legal in 2013, two years before the federal ruling. There is also a fairly high amount of LGBTQ+ folks in the state, with 4.1 percent of Minnesota adults identifying

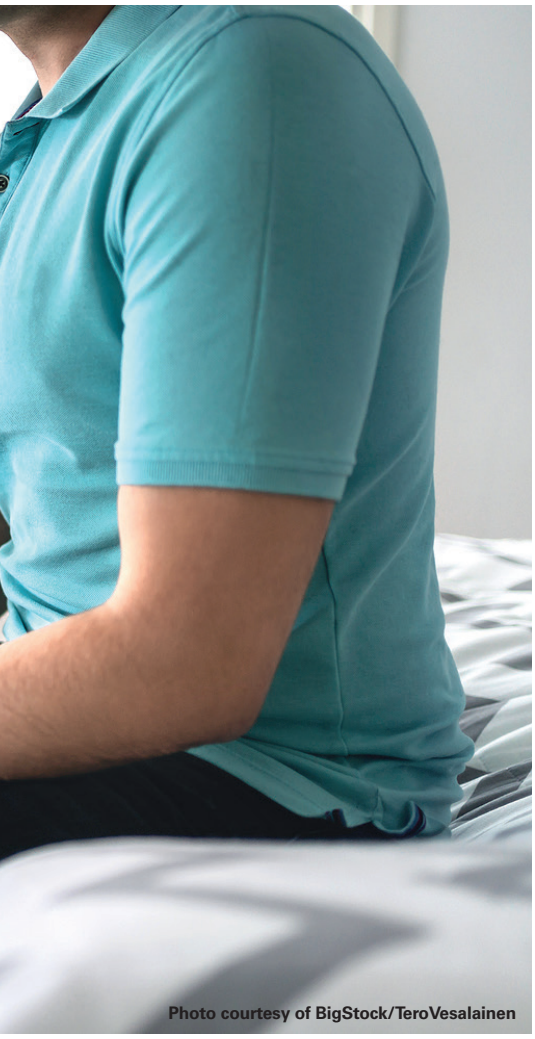

Photo courtesy of BigStock/TeroVesalainen

as LGBTQ+. Of all same-sex couples in Minnesota, 28 percent of them are raising children, according to the Movement Advancement Project.

Like all couples in the process of divorcing in Minnesota, at least one partner in an LGBTQ+ couple must reside in the state for at least 180 days before filing for divorce. Couples married in other states or nations with legal same-sex marriage can divorce upon meeting Minnesota's minimum residency requirement, according to the Minnesota Family Law Blog.

Minnesota allows same-sex couples to petition for adoption. For LGBTQ+ couples married before same-sex marriage was legalized in Minnesota, custody disputes may be more complicated by second-parent adoption arrangements, which were common for gay and lesbian couples prior to 2013.

If you or someone you know is in need of resources for LGBTQ+ divorce, visit Lawyers.com. ∎

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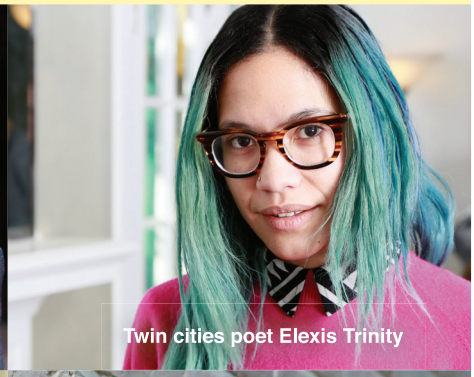

Twin cities poet Elexis Trinity

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Uptown / New Brighton / Grand Ave. in St. Paul

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Death In A Marriage – One Last Thing

End of life hurdles faced by the LGBTQ+ community

BY RYAN PATCHIN

End of life planning comes with nuanced challenges for members of the LGBTQ+ community. A person's family of origin and their chosen family may be well-blended, or they could be completely foreign to one another—creating a vacuum in communication between families. For long-term, unmarried couples—death can be especially tricky.

In what may be the worst cases, survivors are forced into a form of *disenfranchised grief.* The relationship may have never been validated by the families of those involved, or viewed as less important and easily replaceable. Many survivors deal with grief outside of public view and without social support. Too often, surviving partners are sent down a dark, convoluted path. Alone.

The United States is an outlier, falling behind many industrialized countries when it comes to nationalized paid leave policies. The policies that *do* exist tend to favor more "traditional" households and families, even though the latest census data shows only 18.4 percent of American households conform to "traditional" norms. Oftentimes, a deceased person's chosen family is left out of end-of-life decision making completely—intentionally or otherwise.

In 2019, New Jersey became the first state in the nation to pass legislation that called for paid leave in relation to chosen families. The law says workers are entitled to a 12-week paid leave to care for a sick member of their chosen family. Oregon, Connecticut, and Colorado have plans to follow suit. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) was purposely developed using broad language, allowing workers to care for the individuals that need or expect their care. This was seen as a major step in expanding family caregiving for private workers.

COVID-19 response expedited the typically slow, bureaucratic process for passing such protections. The FFCRA was a temporary measure

Continued on page 20

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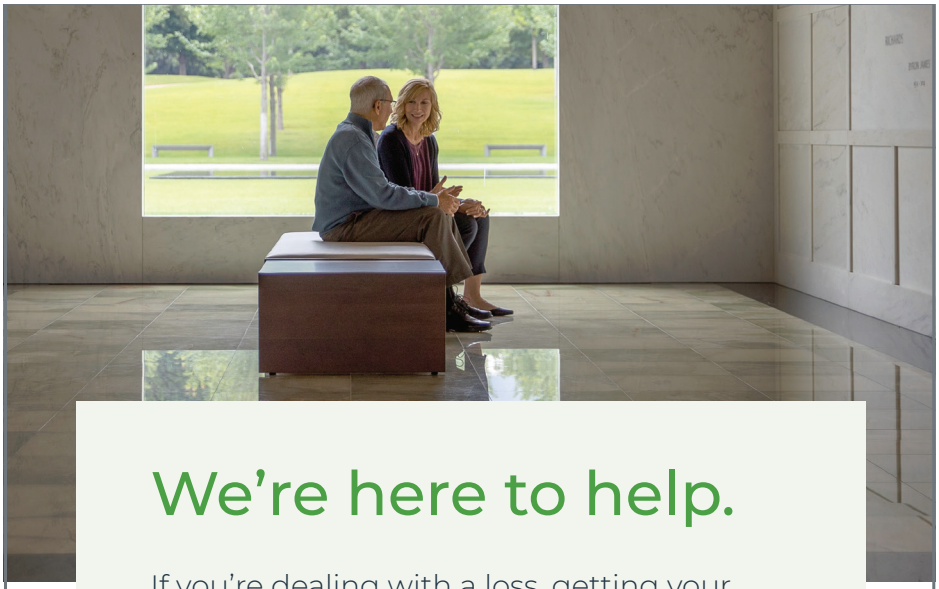

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that expired at the end of 2020—but it demonstrated that an inclusive national paid leave policy is feasible. It opened the door for possible legislation down the road.

What if "down the road" is too far away? In 2018, Queensland woman Jo Grant married her partner of eight years, Jill Kindt—and became the first legally married gay couple in Australia. Their union lasted just 48 days, ending with the tragic death of Jo Grant, who was terminally ill. Jo and Jill were approved, married, and registered all in one day, thanks to the registrar's ruling of special circumstances. Jo's family believes the marriage "renewed Jo's spirit, keeping her alive long enough to have one last Christmas with her family."

After meeting in 1965, Bob Husky and Jack Zawadski fell in love and spent decades moving around the United States, working as special education teachers. In 1997, the couple retired in Mississippi. In 2015, Bob and Jack were legally married, weeks after gay marriage was legally recognized—but the honeymoon was short-lived. Less than two months after their nuptials, Bob Huskey's health began to deteriorate and he was moved into a nursing home.

Bob's family made pre-arrangements with the local funeral home, who assured them everything would be handled when the time came. When Bob Huskey died on May 10, 2016, his family was stunned to learn that the funeral home had "adamantly" refused to provide services for Bob Huskey, after learning the sex of his spouse through paperwork. Jack was left scrambling, forced to use a facility 90 miles away—ultimately canceling funeral services for his husband.

"Bob was my life, and we had always felt so welcome in this community. And then, at a moment of such personal pain and loss, to have someone do what they did to me, to us, to Bob, I just couldn't believe it. No one should be put through what we were put through."

With the help of his nephew, John Gaspari, Zawadski filed a lawsuit against the funeral home. The suit sought damages from Picayune Funeral Home's parent company, Brewer Funeral Services, and its owners—for breach of contract, negligent misrepresentation, and the intentional and negligent infliction of emotional distress.

Bob died in 2018, while his case was still moving through the Mississippi circuit court system. His nephew continues to battle for the rights of his uncle and his uncle's partner, years after their deaths.

The right to a dignified death can be overlooked, especially in a society where most approve of same sex marriage. For a union to go the distance, only to have the end of the relationship marred by litigation and bigotry adds another dimension of horror to already trying times. If your lifestyle has been "accepted" by your peers, shouldn't your death come with the same, dignified response?

Recent legislation and evolving opinions have created meaningful progress toward end-of-life rights for same sex couples, yet there are leaps to be made. ▮

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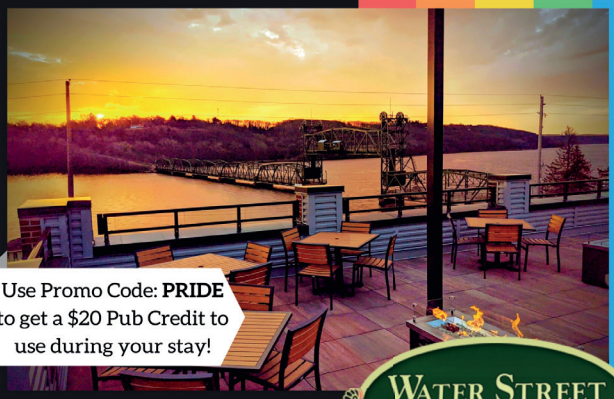

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Appetite For Change

BY HOLLY PETERSON

Picking a caterer is tough. From flavor to aesthetics to price point, there is so much to think about. On the off chance that you are having trouble picking a caterer for your upcoming event (COVID-friendly, of course), *Lavender* would like to introduce you to one of our favorites. Breaking Bread Catering has an incredible selection of menu items that your guests are sure to remember. Breaking Bread Catering is also a part of the local non-profit group Appetite For Change, which means that when you choose Breaking Bread Catering, you are directly supporting a collection of organizations that have been combating food insecurity in Northeast Minneapolis for the last ten years.

Appetite For Change was built by LaTasha Powell, Michelle Horovitz, and Princess Haley. With sub-organizations that specialize in things like urban farming, cooking classes, meal distribution, and more, Appetite For Change is one of the most impactful food-based organizations in the Twin Cities. "We believe food is the key ingredient to nourishing wellbeing," says President Tasha Powell. "Systemic barriers make accessing fresh food in North Minneapolis a challenge for many. Through youth and workforce development programs, social enterprises, and policy initiatives, we build community capacity to engage with the food system in a fresh and sustainable way."

As far as catering goes, Breaking Bread Catering does it all: from business lunches and breakfasts to gorgeous dinners. "Breaking Bread Catering highlights the Northside's richness," says Communications Director Meagan Healy, "providing a variety of fresh, made-from-scratch dishes and exceptional service for events of any size." With mouth-watering options like Curried Potato Cakes, Classic Southern Fried Chicken, Slow Cooked Beef Brisket, Vegan BBQ Tofu, and Blackened Shrimp and Cheese Grits Shooters, you will easily fill out a menu that your guests will rave over.

Vice President of Strategy and Finance, Aaron Palm, says that Breaking Bread Catering continues to take full-service orders "on a situational basis, as [they]…have to adapt to the current recommendations to service orders." Breaking Bread Catering is also looking forward to the warmer months when outdoor catering is an option again.

The need for catering slowed down during the pandemic, but Breaking Bread made the best of the situation by using that extra time to make meals for those in need. This spring Breaking Bread will split in two divisions: a brick-and-mortar café and a catering division with a focus on job training. "We have always been intentional about hiring individuals with barriers to employment," says Healy, "and providing case management, mentorship, and support to ensure success within the organization and beyond."

"[By] visiting Breaking Bread Café (when it opens) or using Breaking Bread Catering, both social enterprises of AFC, you are directly supporting our mission," says Stephanie Malone, Vice President of Advancement. But if you want to volunteer for the organization as well, there are plenty of ways that you can do that. After all, the food is only half of the reason why we love Breaking Bread Catering. The other half is the litany of impactful projects that the organization spearheads.

"We have an array of ways to volunteer," Malone continues. "There are many opportunities for folks to help in our seven urban gardens with sowing and tending [the] chemical free crops we cultivate." Other volunteer options include assisting with meal box delivery, other gardening tasks, and more.

If you are looking for a long-term volunteer opportunity, Appetite For Change is happy to talk to individuals and groups alike about other projects. Malone continues, "we welcome help from individuals with special professional expertise or knowledge that can be applied to meaningful skills-based volunteer projects. As a nonprofit, we are grateful for volunteers who help amplify our work."

Appetite For Change is also invested in providing resources and opportunities for the youth of Northeast Minneapolis. This year they diligently recalibrated their mission to make sure that the most prescient youth needs were addressed – specifically new social and emotional needs that have resulted from the pandemic.

"Our youth are facing unprecedented demands of distance learning, limitations on social gatherings, and increased reliance on them to support the care of younger children in the home while parents work," explains Taronda Richardson, YTOP Program Manager. "We are taking great care to offer low stress and flexible opportunities for our youth to engage in job and leadership training…Our main objective continues to be to provide a safe space for our youth…while also being connected to trusted adults who can aid in healing, support, and personal growth."

Whether you choose to volunteer your time for any of the worthy projects that Appetite For Change facilitates, patronize the restaurants that support Appetite For Change, or use Breaking Bread Catering for your next big event, we are confident that you will love this organization as much as we do.

Visit the Appetite For Change website or their social media channels for more information.

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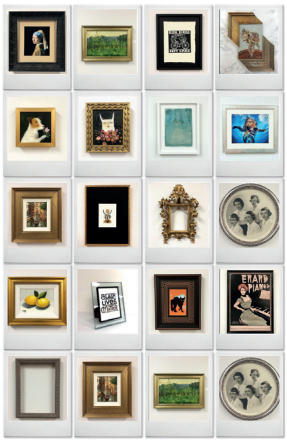

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Lauren Baker Photography

BY RYAN PATCHIN

From far away, many wedding celebrations may look the same, but when you zoom-in on the people involved and the story that's being written in front of your eyes—each ceremony is as unique as the people taking part in it.

Accommodating that uniqueness requires a certain expertise and an unattainable Zen. Add COVID, and you've got yourself a season. The past 14 months have thrown a curveball that has targeted some industries harder than others. Weddings, for all intents and purposes, were banned for the majority of 2020, with celebrations still hindered by capacity caps and food restrictions as we cruise through 2021.

To get a better idea of the current commitment climate, I spoke with local photographer Lauren Baker, and events planner Dana Allison:

WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS FOR EVENT PREPARATION? FROM INITIAL CONSULT, TO DAY OF THE EVENT?

DA: During the [planning] process, I always make sure to not only encourage my clients to make sure the day is a reflection of themselves, but also to do what they can to ensure a wonderful guest experience. I work with clients on finding the right venue and vendors that fit their style, budget and values, create a look that makes sense for them, and plan out all of the logistics of the day. My clients get to focus on what is important to them during the planning and on the day of the wedding…

LB: I'm there to guide and prepare my couples to have a day that is truly about them. I provide planning and preparation tips that relieve

Continued on page 26

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the couple's stress and anxiety leading up to the wedding so that they can feel confident and relaxed on their wedding day—so that they can actually enjoy their wedding day. I strive to get to know my clients on a friend level so they not only feel comfortable around me, but also trust and know that I have their best intentions at heart.

My couples and I take engagement photos together leading up to their wedding, too. Taking engagement photos together provides my couples with essential posing practice and confidence in front of the camera and it helps me plan for how I'll photograph them on their wedding day. I also create my couple's wedding day photography timeline and family photo shot list for them so that my couples don't have to spend the time or effort creating either. After their wedding, in addition to editing their digital images, I design their wedding album for them and design wall art for their homes.

WHAT TRENDS IN WEDDING PLANNING/ PHOTOGRAPHY ARE YOU SEEING IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

DA: Many couples are wanting to celebrate their love with smaller guest counts, to have those VIPs present with them, and to give them the VIP treatment: Good food, open bars, and a personalized experience.

LB: I'm seeing the use of bolder, brighter colors in weddings and I'm all for that! I'm also seeing an increase of intimate (or "micro") weddings with more luxury design elements incorporated into them.

HOW HAS COVID IMPACTED YOUR BUSINESS?

DA: COVID has affected my business like so many others: postponements, cancellations, people being nervous to book. However, in some ways it has been good, as I think planners have really had the chance to shine and show our value. For weddings, couples are embracing smaller guest counts, finding creative ways to serve food, and having different entertainment that isn't dancing. People are finding ways to make them work.

LB: Weddings are more intimate events now than they were over a year ago, though they're no less meaningful. With fewer guests, couples are able to interact with each person in attendance; speaking with each guest is rare with large weddings.

WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR GETTING THROUGH THE WEDDING DAY AS STRESS-FREE AS POSSIBLE?

DA: First, at the very least, hire a professional wedding manager. They will be the one to take charge so you can step back and let go. Second, have a realistic timeline for how long things will take to happen, which your wedding manager can help you with along with photography and catering. Finally, keep in mind the things that are important: the two of you getting married, and celebrating your love with family and friends. The rest are just details.

WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST WEDDING PHOTOS POSSIBLE?

LB: Communication and good lighting are the keys to great photos. For example, if you want light and bright wedding reception photos, you're going to want to book a venue with lots of windows and light walls. For great wedding portraits, trust and be open with your photographer. Communicate with them if you have any sensitivities (i.e. a favorite side, if you don't like your arms, etc). Knowing information like that will allow your photographer to be exceptionally mindful while they're taking your photo. Also, trust your photographer when he/she/they make suggestions – it's usually given with the intention of getting a great photograph.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET A HOLD OF YOU?

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DA: Visit my website at www.keyedupevents.com to book an appointment, email me at dana@keyedupevents.com, or DM me on Instagram at @keyedupevents. ▮

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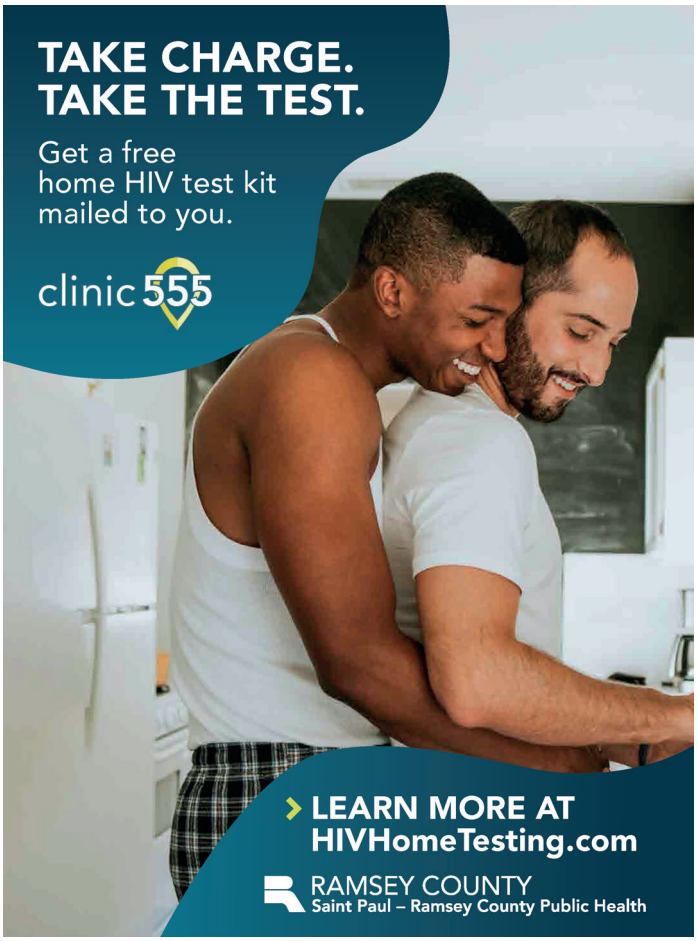

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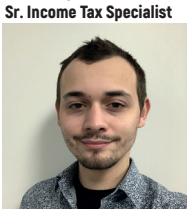
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LEATHER LIFE | BY STEVE LENIUS

Virtual Leather

This installment of this column is a time capsule. Someday, far in the future, someone will read this column and be amazed at what members of the leather/BDSM/fetish community, in the Twin Cities as well as in other parts of this country, were willing to do in 2020 and 2021 as they tried to survive a global pandemic. (But you're not reading this column someday far in the future, are you? You're reading it now, today, while the pandemic still is going on. That being the case, read on to see the record I am leaving here for future generations.)

Just over a year ago the global coronavirus pandemic caused humanity to hit the "pause" button. Along with everyone else, this included members of the leather/BDSM/fetish community. They, like the rest of humanity, have had to develop various coping strategies and skills to try to keep their community, and at least some measure of their sanity, intact.

One of these coping strategies and skills is using virtual leather gatherings—online, remote, live-streamed versions of gatherings or parties that formerly were (and we hope in the future will again be) in-person events held in physical spaces.

It's not that doing things virtually is necessarily a new thing for members of the leather/BDSM/fetish community. As far back as 1999, this column described sex toys that could be remotely controlled over the Internet using a Web browser (with visuals of reactions to the toy beamed back via webcam). And sometimes community members haven't even needed the Internet—I have heard stories of amazing dom/sub scenes conducted entirely by telephone.

What's new for this community is being limited to virtual socializing. Right now, that's the only kind of socializing community members can do safely. As someone who has been part of a fair number of these virtual gatherings, I can say there are many disadvantages to them compared to in-person events—but, paradoxically and perhaps perversely, there also can be advantages. And virtual gatherings are, at least to me, still a bit surreal.

An in-person party or social event happens at a certain place to which attendees travel—perhaps across town, perhaps across the country, perhaps across the world. By contrast, with a virtual gathering the concept of "place" becomes almost meaningless; without leaving the comfort of one's living room one can virtually travel to, say, Chicago for an event hosted by the Leather Archives & Museum (see below).

When attendees arrive at an in-person event, they usually find at least several groups of people chatting, and it is possible to circulate from group to group. Many conversations are going on at the same time. By contrast, a virtual gathering convened using today's technology is almost always one big group; there is nowhere to circulate.

And in that one big group there is one conversation going on. Because of technological limits, as a general rule only one person talks at a time; if two or more people talk at the same time, the sound tends to be garbled and it's almost impossible to tell what any of the speakers were saying.

One surreal feature of virtual gatherings is that, in my experience, it seems as if I am sitting alone on one side of a table, and everyone else is sitting on the other side of the table—looking at me. And everyone else is in the same position—sitting alone on one side of a table across from everyone else.

Furthermore, after all the virtual leather gatherings I have been part of, I still am not sure whether the gallery-view grid on my computer screen, containing moving pictures of fellow kinksters, reminds me more of *Hollywood Squares* or the opening of *The Brady Bunch*. (And if it's *Hollywood Squares*, who is sitting in Paul Lynde's center-square spot?)

I have seen people participating in these meetings from their hot tub. I have seen them giving and receiving massages. I have seen them doing leather care. I have seen talking heads in eight on-screen squares while the ninth square has shown a bondage scene in progress. However, at least at the gatherings I've participated in, there has been no on-camera nudity and nothing illegal—because you never know who else might be watching.

To give some more specific examples, here are descriptions of the most recent virtual leather gatherings I have been part of:

- For many years, the Atons of Minneapolis have hosted a monthly L&L (Leather & Levi) Dinner. I recently joined an online Atons Virtual L&L, which was more a prelude to dinner than an actual dinner. One L&L participant was in a much warmer place than the rest of us, and he took his iPad outside to show us the palm trees swaying in the gentle breeze—while it was 20 degrees below zero in Minnesota.
- In Chicago, the Leather Archives & Museum (LA&M) has long hosted in-person gatherings for Chicago's leather/BDSM/fetish community and for those visiting Chicago. During the pandemic the LA&M has been hosting virtual gatherings, often including conversations with leather luminaries. I recently connected to "LapTop," the LA&M's current series of virtual events held the third Thursday of each month. I was privileged to virtually travel to Chicago and hang out with the evening's featured guests: Judy Tallwing McCarthy, the first-ever International Ms. Leather (1987), and Graylin Thornton, International Mr. Drummer 1993. As I listened to McCarthy and Thornton exchange reminiscences, I had a thought: "Only the LA&M could put together an evening like this." (The next episode of "LapTop" will be Thursday evening, March 18, 2021. Visit leatherarchives.org for details.)
- The Knights of Leather, based in the Twin Cities, recently hosted two virtual gatherings—one on a Saturday evening (theme: "Play") and another the following Sunday morning (theme: "Coffee"). Both were relaxed reunions and check-ins with people whom I lately have not seen nearly enough of. On Saturday evening various people showed off fetishwear, including corsets, posture collars and latex pants. We compared dungeon toys and discussed underutilized dungeons. On Sunday, we talked about what would come after the pandemic ebbed, and what we could do for fun in the meantime. The Knights canceled their Tournament run in 2020 and have canceled it again in 2021—but the club may be hosting a Virtual Tournament later this year. Several people also mentioned how much they missed being able to hug and be hugged. So that's the state of virtual leather in the first part of 2021. For now, it's what we have and what we can do. I wish we could do more. But at this point, I am grateful for any leather contact I can get.

One final, hopeful note: Even with the pandemic going on, people are still seeking out and finding and joining our community. I am seeing people on my virtual gathering computer screen that I have never seen nor met in real life. I hope I get a chance to meet them in person—soon. ∎

SERVE OUR SOCIETY | BY MIKE MARCOTTE

Gay Lesbian Amateur Sport Society

GLASS gives the LGBTQ community the chance to be active and connect

Sean Kennedy wondered why so many gay men showed up on those particular phone app grids every Sunday when he was home. He found out there was a gay volleyball league in the park across the street.

"We made a team with a group of our friends," Kennedy recalled. "None of us had ever played, and we won maybe two sets the entire season, while having a bunch of fun."

That season, someone from another team tipped Kennedy off about a group that would let him and his friends practice their game. That's when he attended his first volleyball open gym of the Gay Lesbian Amateur Sport Society, or GLASS.

What originally started as the Upper Midwest Gay Lesbian Athletic Association in December 1991, GLASS provides volleyball and tennis play, along with competitions, for the LGBTQ+ community. In recent years, the nonprofit has shifted their attention to focus solely on volleyball.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, GLASS hosted volleyball open gym nights Mondays through Thursdays. Each evening is catered for different levels of play, from beginners to advanced. It will be back to a similar model once restrictions are lifted.

Prior to COVID, the beginner open gym on Tuesdays averaged 45 to 60 people. "We regularly remind folks it's a night for learning and fun, and I like the culture we've got going on there," Kennedy said.

Their protocols have obviously shifted due to coronavirus.

Eric D. Nelson is the GLASS Board President. He's been playing with GLASS since 1998.

"COVID has greatly impacted the organization," Nelson said. "We were able to do some limited grass volleyball this summer with limited participants and masks. We have been able to start limited open gym again in January twice a week, but participant numbers are limited to 24 a night with sign ups. We are filling up reservations within minutes, with waiting lists to play."

"We have hand sanitizer at each court, extra masks, and regularly change out balls during play," Kennedy added. "The hardest adjustment for me initially was not high-fiving all my teammates after every point, but we're really good at elbow bumps these days."

Prior to COVID, an open volleyball gym night for the Gay Lesbian Amateur Sport Society averaged 45 to 60 people. They now cap the number of those who can participate each session. Photo credit Carl Seagren.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Alex Urquhart joined GLASS in 2015. "I got into GLASS because I wanted to not be so awful at volleyball, and I wanted to help a friend get more involved in something gay outside of the bar scene," Urquhart said.

He runs the beginner gym open night and describes what happens during a typical session.

"The first 15 minutes are for warm-ups. If you are new, someone will usually approach you and offer to pair up with you. If you need help finding a partner, the night's organizers will either find you someone or warm up with you."

"After warm up, we have announcements. Then we play. An algorithm will place you on a team designed for balance. You will then play with that team all night. If you are a long-time player but first time to GLASS, you normally will jump right in. If you are new to volleyball like I was, people will offer help, show you techniques, and offer advice."

"For some people, this is the first time they have ever touched a volleyball. For others, they have been playing for 50 years. Play is fun and unapologetically queer."

MORE THAN JUST A GAME

"My life would have been way different if I didn't start playing volleyball with GLASS," Nelson told *Lavender*. "My closest friends are people I met through this organization. Through GLASS, I was introduced to the North American Gay Volleyball Association. I have played volleyball tournaments all over the United State and Canada, meeting tons of amazing people and sharing lots of amazing experiences."

Nelson isn't the only one who understands the impact of GLASS.

"I had no idea I would love volleyball this much," Urquhart said. "Six years ago, I had literally never touched a volleyball. Today, I play as often as I can and ref for a league in the city. I love to play, talk about, and watch volleyball. That all started with GLASS."

And GLASS serves as an additional way to connect with others in the LGBTQ community.

"There are stories of love, and love-adjacent relationships for sure," Kennedy reflected. "Many members that have been involved can say they have long lasting friendships that stem from GLASS. All kinds of people come to play, and I don't guarantee you'll meet your next boyfriend or roommate by attending (although it happens), but you'll find great people worth getting to know outside of open gym."

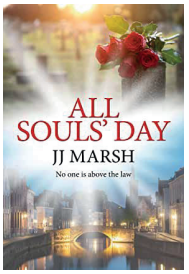
And after a difficult year, connecting with great people is what we crave.

"A lot of people are having a hard time as we approach a year of isolating," Kennedy said. "Not everyone is ready to be in a space like an open gym yet, but if people are looking for ways to be active and connect, I'd say when you're ready to give us a try! We really try to make everyone feel welcome."

No experience is needed to attend a GLASS open gym night at Minnehaha Academy in Minneapolis, but organizers say a positive attitude is always appreciated. You can learn about the Gay Lesbian Amateur Sport Society on their website, www.glassports.org, or you can stay up-to-date by liking their Facebook group. ∎

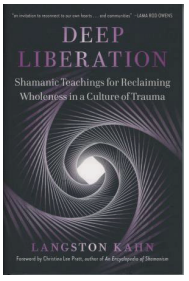
Lavender's Serve Our Society series highlights Minnesota-based nonprofits. To nominate an organization, email mike@givemethemike.com. To read other Serve Our Society features, head to www.givemethemike.com.

BOOKS | BY E.B. BOATNER



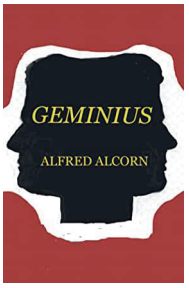
All Soul's Day
JJ Marsh
Prewett Bielmann
$12.99

In Brussels, PI Beatrice Stubbs, receives assistant Theo's call–their embezzler suspect is in Bruges. Ignoring her banker client's directive to step down, Beatrice hops a train to Bruges–finds the suspect hanged in his hostel. Returned to her cottage (there's a lot of Eurostar travel here) beloved Matthew's mental confusion has increased, one daughter's out of work, another pregnant; quirky friend Catinca Radu awaits a career–transforming design order, but… The "suicide" was murder, and there're indications of international banking money-laundering. Beatrice is torn; Find the killer? Stay home nursing Matthew? Trapping the rich lecher who sexually attacked Catinca without losing her endangering that career-launch for his daughter's wedding dress designs? This is Beatrice's twelfth adventure; will she sleuth again for a baker's-dozen? Please!



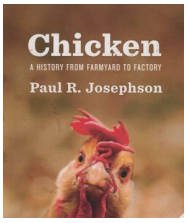
Deep Liberation: Shamanic Teachings for Reclaiming Wholeness in a Culture of Trauma
Langston Kahn
North Atlantic Books
$19.95

Addressing the trauma within, requires entering one's self to face the myriad ways we ourselves maintain toxic social systems. Shamanic healer Langston Kahn teaches these techniques through his "Deep Liberation Process," which he describes as a method by which "true transformation starts in the body with a change of heart." As we have internalized fear-based stories, old traumas, and constraining emotional patterns, so it is we who hold the keys to their release. Shamanism has been practiced in the world for tens of thousands of years because it *is* effective, and Kahn teaches methods of using those skills in today's world to navigate today's society. Shamanism is not a religion, requires no adherence to dogma, yet offers practices and techniques for release and restored health.



Geminius
Alfred Alcorn
Colrain Press
$15.95

It's May, 2041, and Marcus Aurelius McIssac, 65, author of *The Blob in the Machine*, on the cusp of his sabbatical year, is deciding whether to accept the offer from UPload to be first to undergo a WBE, Whole Brain Emulation, with perhaps TNE (total neural emulation) as well. Marcus, though estranged from son Jacques, is uxoriously attached to wife Lilly. He accepts. What could go wrong? Alcorn suggests a few things, and opens our minds to others. For one, the completed doppelganger remembers *everything* about Lilly. He, Geminius, wants to meet her. He wants to… Alcorn sets up an interesting premise, and embellishes the tale with his wry knowledge of learning along the Charles: Marcus's university title is "The Melon-Musk Professor of Imagination Studies."



Chicken: A History from Farmyard to Factory
Paul R. Josephson
Polity
$25

Man domesticated chickens some thousands of years ago, and into the 20th century the birds have provided eggs, meat, and company. Josephson is most concerned with the fowls' fate today; near-identical units in a vast economic system engineering broilers crammed around the globe in CAFOs, or concentrated animal feed operations. Chickens aren't, of course the only creatures man raises for profit, crowded, often sick, unable to move, to forage naturally, or to step out their ordure. Over 53 billion are killed annually, and, on one day, during the 2018 Super Bowl, Americans consumed 1.3 billion chicken wings. Josephson gives a rich overview of bird, culture, and technology, pointing out that as in other farm crops, there are dangers in creating these monocultures; they're vast but fragile. ∎

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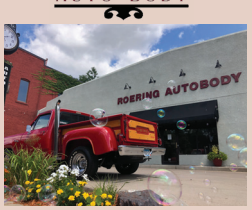

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SKIRTING THE ISSUES | BY ELLEN KRUG

EASY PREY

It's a tough time to be a transgender or nonbinary youth in America. (Due to word limits, I'm including nonbinary people within the "transgender" umbrella.)

As I compose this, the legislatures of nearly half the states in this country are considering various proposed laws that, if enacted, would devastate trans humans younger than eighteen. The legislative proposals include the old standby—"bathroom bills" that would ban students from utilizing school bathrooms and locker rooms that conform to their gender identities (compared to the gender assigned them at birth).

But those who deem transgender/nonbinary humans lesser have used their imaginations to the Nth degree to come up with even more oppressive measures to erase young vulnerable people.

Thus, twenty-four states have introduced legislation to prohibit transgender students from participating in sports. Last year, Idaho succeeded in enacting a law banning transgender youth from high school and college sports, but presently the ACLU has that tied up in court. Studies have repeatedly shown that transgender athletes [the focus usually is on transgender females] have no distinct advantage over their cisgender competitors.

The state of Georgia is so worried about transgender athletes that legislators have proposed creating a panel of three doctors to examine the genitals of every female student athlete to ensure that a trans girl doesn't slip by. Unbelievable.

Even worse, at least fifteen states seek to prohibit, and in some cases, criminalize, medical and therapeutic treatment for transgender persons younger than 18 (in Mississippi, the targeted upper end age is 21). In other words, they want to put doctors, nurses, and therapists who provide life-saving care to trans kids in jail.

Some of these bills are titled "vulnerable child" or "compassionate care" acts, as if the goal is to protect humans who are at risk. That's laughable.

The actual underlying premise for this legislation is that gender dysphoria (the disconnect between brain and body) isn't real—or at worst, simply transitory—and that eventually, as a trans-identifying kid matures, he or she will grow out of it and be "normal" like their cisgender contemporaries.

Most elected officials introducing this kind of legislation have never met even a single transgender person or their parents. Owing to outright propaganda, much of it being conservative religion-based, many abhor my community or don't even want to try to understand. Heck, even one Arizona legislator, who introduced a bill mandating that driver's licenses could only have an "F" or "M" for gender markers (and effectively erasing nonbinary persons) said, "What's going to happen if someone wakes up and wants to identify as a chicken or something for crying out loud?"

I got a similar question fifteen months ago when I spoke to an audience of 140 in Hastings, Minnesota that included folks from conservative churches. The question—"What if a fifty-year-old-man decides he's a ten-year-old-girl, Ellie?"—sounded as if it had been transphobic flyer fodder intended to stoke fear about transgender people.

My answer was practical and respectful; I replied, "That just simply doesn't happen. Fifty-year-old men don't do that. In fact, no one does that."

The reality is that many of the anti-transgender youth legislative pieces are almost identical—it's called "pattern legislation"—and they're created by one entity: the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative monolith that, among other things, targets transgender humans (It's also been designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center). After all, there are still many people who've never knowingly met a trans person, and thus, it's easy to prey on us and fundraise off the human fear of "Other."

Those who have followed my columns and work know that protecting transgender kids and youth (and the families who love them) is paramount for me. I'm sorry if I sound like a broken record, but humans reading this, you must step up. We must band together to protect those who lack voices of their own.

I continue to fall back on the image of a fourteen-year-old transgender girl in Willmar or Thief River Falls or Virginia, Minnesota—who hears about how so many states—and people—want to make her disappear. In those communities, there may be no one—at least publicly—who understands. She may very well believe that it will never get any better, meaning there are not many options for her.

If you are younger and reading this, please know I CARE ABOUT YOU. While I'm by no means a therapist, I will talk to you—email me at elliejkrug@gmail.com (make sure to include the "j"), and we will set something up. I will share about how things ultimately will get better. I promise!

Yes, I'm a hopeless idealist who believes she can make a difference.

It would be nice if that could be my epitaph.∎

Ellen (Ellie) Krug, the author of *Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change*, speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign-up for her monthly e-newsletter, *The Ripple*. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.

JAMEZ SITINGS | BY JAMEZ L. SMITH

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1992 – Broken Heart Shattered
Nervous Breakdown
Lonely With Despair
Escape The Deep White North
to keep The Dream Alive.
1992 San Francisco, The Return Home!
Burglarized the very first day.
1993:
Police escort from Mother's Home
Dared stand betwixt Children
and Threat of Death.
Haven't spoken with my sister since.
94 – 95
The struggle to survive.
Part-time temp jobs
99 cent two-wing dinners
Working a Club Scene
That worked to keep me down
Threatened by lies
Fearful of Truth
1996 –
The Fix-Up
A Sexual encounter
Multiplied into a Romance
Blossomed into Love
Flowers plucked
crushed underfoot
A Grown Man
Afraid of Pinnochio
Never was a Real Boy.
1997.
The Great Fire Of,
preceded by Thirteen Deaths
Another shattering
of reconstructed heart
Forced from Dream Job
by one who wanted to be the Only
Black Man.
Kicked out of flat
for not fucking David
who never offered
to share a bed.
Grandfather dies saying, "Poor Annette. Poor Annette."
Move back in with Mom, Poor Annette,
And the kids
and their kids
All those people
All that drama
And a meth lab next door
Burning Down The House.
1998 – More of the same.
Fewer fires.
1999
I don't want to die.
I'd rather dance my life away.

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America's largest Pride issue

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